

June 2000

A Salute to Teens



School Health Connections

School Health Connections is an interdepartmental program between the California Department of Health Services and the California Department of Education dedicated to improving the health and academic success of children and youth. This is accomplished through a coordinated school health system that combines health education, health promotion, disease prevention, and access to health-related services in an integrated manner.

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RICHMOND HIGH SCHOOL PEER-TO-PEER PROJECT PROSPERS

Jessica Ramirez is 16 and a soph-omore at Richmond High School, located in the San Francisco Bay Area. She has an important mission cut out for herself: educating her peers and members of her community about affordable health care coverage.

"It's important that I let my classmates know about health care programs and how they can help themselves and their siblings be healthier. I want to get the information out."

Jessica is one of some 12 Richmond students who go into classrooms at the high school spreading the word.

She's armed with three poster board illustrations outlining available low-cost and no-cost health care coverage programs in California, which she and a group of teens made.

These same teens can be seen passing out health care coverage program information and setting up appointments for enrollment at farmers markets, local churches and anywhere parents might gather in the community. Students in the project are instructed by adults familiar with state health care programs. They receive training as certified application assistants (CAA).

"These teens are so great," says Carole Nelson, a liaison with Communities In Schools at Richmond High School. Nelson, along with Healthy Start Coordinator Maya Hernandez, oversees the program

that has teens talking to teens about good health, including health care coverage. "They can switch back and forth between being ambassadors of health care programs and then living their lives as typical teens."

"Teens should be involved in their own health care coverage. After all, it's their bodies, eyes and teeth. They're the ones who can't see the blackboard!"

—Carole Nelson,
Communities In Schools

Jessica agrees wholeheartedly and adds, "I have become a better person through this program. I've learned more about my environment, and I communicate with a whole lot of people."

PEER PROJECT IS TEAM EFFORT

California is home to approximately two million uninsured children, topping the nation in both its rate and number of uninsured children. Over 1.2 million of those children are eligible for either the Healthy Families Program or Medi-Cal for Children. Getting more young people enrolled in these programs is crucial: children without health care coverage can experience a higher absenteeism rate from school due to illness and

suffer from easily preventable health problems.

The Contra Costa County Health Department, Consumers Union and Communities In Schools worked together to make the Richmond peer project a reality. United Way has also pledged its support. Students participating as peer educators were recruited from those attending informational meetings on how to get involved in the community. They were joined by teens from the local Neighborhood Youth Corps, which is part of the federally funded Joint Training Partnership Act.

"These students are not the leadership kids in the school. They are kids who may never have thought of doing something like this. Learning to make presentations takes a lot of training and practice. But it is amazing how once the kids make the commitment, their self-confidence and image blossoms," says Nelson.

Richmond High has a large English as a Second Language population. "So many of our parents don't speak English," says Nelson.

(Continued on page 2)



ROSES To:

SUPERINTENDENTS AND SCHOOL FOOD SERVICE DIRECTORS from over 270 districts statewide who became active partners in promoting the State's low-cost and free health insurance programs. Schools became the number one referral source for Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children (HF/MCC) information and applications. These 270 districts sent home a parental HF/MCC "Request for Information" flyer in back-to-school packets and/or with the Free and Reduced Price Meals Application during the 1999–2000 school year.

Because of these districts' participation, approximately 50,000 flyers were returned by parents requesting information and applications. The highest response came from the School Lunch Program. Thanks to the participating districts!

VACAVILLE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT AND THE VACAVILLE POLICE DEPARTMENT—for their unique partnership program, Parents and Students Seeking Success (PSSS). Located on school sites, PSSS has six social workers overseeing 15 family support workers who visit a family at home when a child is having difficulty in school. A multidisciplinary team (principal, school nurses and police social workers) determine which families are in need. PSSS works with the parents for intervention.

PSSS acquaints the family with "wrap-around services"—whatever is available in the community to help the family. "That includes low-cost and free health care coverage," says Beverly Gable, program manager, Vacaville Police Department. "We help them access the programs and fill out the paperwork. It is important that these families are given a sense of support from the community for their most treasured gift, their own children." For more information, call Beverly Gable at (707) 449-5216.



ATTENTION SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS

Did you receive your California School Boards Association (CSBA) Sample Policy entitled, "Student Health and Social Services"?

Mailed in April 2000, school board members were urged to adopt the policy in a show of support for a child's academic achievement through access to affordable health care coverage. Action steps were also included. The policy was developed in partnership with CSBA, the State Departments of Health and Education and the Managed Risk Medical Insurance Board.

For a copy of the mailing, call School Health Connections at (916) 653-7746. The policy can be viewed on CSBA's web site, www.csba.org.

(*"RICHMOND HIGH SCHOOL"—Continued from page 1*)

One student presenter, Seag Saephan, a 17-year old senior, realized that he didn't have health insurance, worked with his parents to sign himself up in Healthy Families and now pays the monthly premium himself. "I like taking care of myself," he says.

Jessica Ramirez recently gave a speech in Texas about the teen project. "Jessica's come a long way to be able to do that," says Nelson. "After the presentation a woman asked Jessica for her autograph explaining, 'When you are an adult, you will be somebody.' Now that's the ultimate compliment!"

The insert in this month's newsletter, "Good News About Health Care Coverage" can be put in back-to-school packets or sent home with the Free & Reduced Price Meals Application. It is available in 11 languages. It can be ordered only by schools, districts or offices of education through the State in bulk quantities—free of charge! (See back page of insert for order form.)

The insert can also be distributed at back-to-school nights, open houses, in parent newsletters and with report cards.

COASTAL COMMUNITY RAISING TEEN AWARENESS

"Teens are wonderful to work with and have a style all their own. What stands out to me is that teens don't like to be singled out or stick out in a crowd. They want to be individuals but only in the sense of getting respect from peers. Knowing this, instead of looking at Healthy Families and Medi-Cal for Children as a 'poor you, you need this' kind of thing, we need to approach the whole issue of health care coverage by encouraging teens to take responsibility—for themselves, their siblings and friends."

These are the words of Elaine Hanks, RN, coordinator of the Fortuna Community Resource Center and Student Health Information Center at Fortuna High School. Hanks actively helps teens develop life-long, good health care habits. She has a passion for encouraging teens to become active in understanding and getting their own health care coverage.

RURAL COMMUNITY HAS TAKEN ITS KNOCKS

Fortuna is a wind-swept, rugged northern California town located approximately 250 miles north of San Francisco and 17 miles south of Eureka. Hanks says that this rural Humboldt County community, where fishing and logging are principal industries, has seen major economic changes. "Our economy is not booming. We now have a high unemployment rate and employers are giving less and less benefits. As a result, parents opt to drop health insurance for dependents."

Fortuna is highly isolated. Fortuna High School has five feeder elementary schools, some as far as 30 miles away. "And that," Hanks says, "covers a lot of narrow winding roads, some of them dirt. An hour's ride on a school bus is not unusual. Outlying areas are sometimes impassable."

Hanks is a certified application assistant (CAA), authorized to help people fill out a joint Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children (HF/MCC) application. "Once the application is sent home, immediate follow-up with parents is

critical. Because of our isolation, the phone is extremely important. People won't come to a central location. Regardless of distances, however, I believe that a CAA should be available to the people, not the other way around." Hanks says parents need assistance in completing the HF/MCC application and like to feel secure that the information they provide is kept confidential.

Once a family has health insurance, Hanks sees parents taking their kids to the doctor for more preventive care. "I also notice that when a young person becomes ill and has health insurance, the parents seek health care more quickly."

INVOLVING TEENS IN HEALTH CARE COVERAGE

Primary on Hanks' agenda is helping teens see the vital need for health insurance programs. "We need to make teens aware of health care coverage programs. If they learn the importance of health care programs and how to access them, they can make getting health care coverage a priority."

Teens come to Hanks' center for health care needs. Once the specific need is addressed, Hanks says the conversation continues about health care programs. "I'll ask them, 'Do you have insurance?' Some don't know whether they do or not, which is an education in itself! The next step is to bring out a HF/MCC application, or whatever fits that teen's need, and start talking about health care coverage."

Hanks says that what really sparks a teen's interest in many cases is if they have siblings.

"No matter what cultural background teens come from, many are used to taking care of their brothers and sisters."

—Elaine Hanks, RN

"I try to validate and applaud teens for caring about their siblings. It is a worthy value for teens to feel like they are in charge of something and doing something good for other people. I encourage them to take that skill and apply it to peers, to the community and throughout life."

Once a teen comes in and discovers how he or she can be an active part of getting health care coverage, the word spreads. "In the next week or two, the teen's friends start showing up asking about health insurance," says Hanks.

FORTUNA HIGH SCHOOL ON TOP OF HEALTH ISSUES

Hanks feels the community is fortunate in that Fortuna High School understands the huge part health plays in a student's academic achievement. Hanks says the staff—teachers, academic counselors, coaches—is well-prepped in responding to questions about health care coverage.

HF/MCC applications are available in the school's main lobby. Sports physicals also reveal whether a family has health insurance. Health care coverage information goes out through the parent newsletter. Also, Fortuna High School is a Healthy Start* school.

Making teens aware that health care needs should be a top priority for them is a major goal for Hanks. "If one of their friends gets ill and is out of school for awhile, use that experience as an example. Take that opportunity to ask other teens: 'Do you have health care coverage?'"

*For more information on Healthy Start and possible funding, visit their web site at www.cde.ca.gov, then click on the Healthy Start link.



HEALTHY FAMILIES & MEDI-CAL FOR CHILDREN

INSURING THE HEALTH OF OUR CHILDREN

BENEFITS:

- Regular checkups (including well-child visits)
- Immunizations
- Prescription medicine
- Lab and x-rays
- Dental and eye care (including eyeglasses)
- Mental health and substance abuse services
- Physician and hospital services

ELIGIBILITY:

- Determined by family income and size, and by age of the child*
- Covers children from birth up to age 19
- Available to U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals and qualified immigrant children regardless of date of entry (a child may qualify for some form of Medi-Cal, regardless of immigration status)

**Children whose family income is up to 250% of the federal income guidelines may qualify for one of these programs. For a family of four, that translates to \$42,636/year (effective April 2000—March 2001).*



- No-cost coverage.
- No monthly premiums.
- No co-payments for any benefit.
- Provides health, dental and vision care coverage.

- Low-cost coverage for children that do not qualify for Medi-Cal.
- Low monthly premiums from \$4 per child to a maximum of \$27 per family.
- No co-payment for preventive services such as immunizations.
- \$5 co-payment for non-preventive services such as going to the doctor due to illness.
- Choice of over 30 major health, dental and vision insurance plans statewide.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

1-888-747-1222

OTHER OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN WHO DO NOT QUALIFY FOR HEALTHY FAMILIES OR MEDI-CAL FOR CHILDREN:

KAISER PERMANENTE CARES FOR KIDS*

provides low-cost health care coverage for uninsured children who are not eligible for no-cost Medi-Cal for Children or Healthy Families. This program covers children under age 19 within Kaiser Permanente's California service area. For more information, call toll-free 1-800-255-5053.

CALIFORNIA KIDS* provides affordable preventive and primary health, dental, vision and behavioral health coverage for undocumented children. For more information, call 1-818-461-1400.

*Not affiliated with or endorsed by the State of California. Eligibility is based on family size and income.

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GOOD NEWS ABOUT HEALTH COVERAGE!

Now, more children qualify for
no-cost or low-cost medical, dental and vision
care coverage programs!

Interested in more information?
Please fill out this form and return it
to your child's school or
call 1-888-747-1222 (toll free).



Healthy kids
make better
students!

☐ Yes, please send me information and an application for health coverage in:

☐ English

☐ Spanish

☐ Armenian

☐ Vietnamese

☐ Korean

☐ Lao

☐ Hmong

☐ Russian

☐ Farsi

☐ Chinese

☐ Cambodian

Would you like a trained Healthy Families/Medi-Cal for Children representative to contact you at the phone
number you list below to help you, free of charge, with the application process? ☐ Yes ☐ No

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PARENT/GUARDIAN'S AREA CODE AND PHONE NUMBER

PARENT/GUARDIAN'S NAME

STREET ADDRESS/PO BOX

CITY

ZIP CODE

COUNTY

SCHOOL NAME

Parent/Guardian's Privacy Notice
The law requires us to tell you what we will
do with any personal information you choose
to send to us on this form. Healthy Families or
the Department of Health Services will send
you information, or if you want to be contacted,
will have a representative use the information
to contact you about health coverage for your
child(ren). This information will not be used
for any other purpose. If you have questions
about this form, please call
1-888-747-1222 (toll-free).

PARENTS/GUARDIANS
Return this form to your child's school
if you want information or someone
to contact you.

SCHOOL STAFF
Please forward this form to your School
Food Services Director or District Health Staff.

SCHOOL FOOD SERVICES DIRECTOR OR
DISTRICT HEALTH STAFF
Please mail this form to:
**Healthy Families/Medi-Cal
for Children Request
State of California
P.O. Box 2590
Rancho Cordova, CA 95741-2590**



HEALTHY FAMILIES AND MEDI-CAL FOR CHILDREN

ORDER FORM

Parent Information Flyer For Schools

ORDER REQUESTED BY:

CONTACT PERSON

SCHOOL NAME

SCHOOL DISTRICT

MAILING ADDRESS

CITY

COUNTY

STATE

ZIP

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PHONE

FAX

Please indicate the quantities of flyers you want in the following languages:

_____ English	_____ Hmong	_____ Cambodian	_____ Lao
_____ Spanish	_____ Chinese	_____ Korean	_____ Farsi
_____ Vietnamese	_____ Russian	_____ Armenian	

Please allow 5–7 working days for standard delivery of your order.

FAX in orders to: 916/859-0778

Mail in orders to: Attn: Outreach Materials for Schools
P.O. Box 13029
Sacramento, CA 95813-4029

AVAILABLE ONLY TO
SCHOOLS, DISTRICTS
AND OFFICES OF
EDUCATION

For Office Use Only:

Date order received: ____/____/____ Date order disbursed: ____/____/____